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ABSTRACT

A study surveyed 132 adult students at a small, rural community college who had dropped out of school. The purpose of the study was to assess the reasons leading to their withdrawal from school so the data collected could be used to design dropout prevention programs for adult students. Data were gathered through a 21-item questionnaire. The study found that adults faced a series of barriers consisting of lack of funds, lack of time, family commitments, change in career goals, health problems, lowered motivation, lack of consistent transportation, job conflicts, and problems associated with completing graduation requirements or enrolling in a four-year institution. Incentives that were found to enhance adults' chances of continuing their education were the desire for a degree, the desire for job advancement, seeking skills for a new career, and pursuing personal interests. The quality of advisory services given by college advisors also played a role in adult student retention. Recommendations were made to: (1) develop a follow-up procedure to track students who do not pre-enroll for a following semester; (2) provide services such as counseling sessions, peer groups, and referral systems; (3) strengthen the advisory system; (4) help teachers strengthen their motivational skills; (5) develop an assistance system to help adults resolve personal problems; and (6) continue to provide extended learning opportunities. (Contains 13 tables and 8 references.) (KC)

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Adults As Dropouts

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Adults As Dropouts

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Abstract

Adults are enrolling in postsecondary education programs in record numbers. The reasons behind this enrollment pattern is a reflection of a variety of interests. Some of these interests are personal while still others are job advancement, new career opportunities, and the desire to complete a program that was never finished. Many of these adults enroll in programs on a part-time basis because of family, job, or financial considerations. The fact that adults are part-time students, in and of itself, will delay degree attainment. It is not uncommon for part-time students to spend four or five years pursuing a two year degree. As the amount of time it takes to complete all degree requirements increases so does the potential of frustration that leads to dropping out. This study surveyed 132 adult students at a small, rural community college who had dropped out of school. The purpose of the study was to assess the reasons leading up to their withdrawal from school so data could be collected that could be used to help design dropout prevention programs for these adult students.

Introduction

"Adults are becoming the nation's most important student population...Of this total, nearly one-third are enrolled in vocationally related programs; almost two million adults are seeking a credential..." (Shulman, 1985, p. 23). This increased number of adult students enrolling in school is a challenge that is currently facing many adult educators and program administrators across the United States. The demographics are also indicating that this adult student population (25 years and older) will continue to grow into the next decade. With such staggering numbers facing adult educators, many professionals must ask themselves some important questions. One important one is "Are our institutions ready to accommodate this growing student population?"

In order to adequately prepare for our new adult emerging population at community colleges and four year colleges some of the following questions need to be asked:

1. Do we have adequate counseling available?
2. Do we have an adult student support network in place?
3. Are there classes in study skills available and tutoring?

4. Is there a flexible scheduling of class times?

5. Do we have a means of following up our adult students?

"By the year 2030, 21.8 percent of our population - 66 million people will be 65 and older...The number of people over 85 will triple by the year 2030" (Harper, 1990, p. 14). Many of these people will want to enhance their lives through additional education or embark on new careers. To successfully teach adults and diminish the numbers of adults who previously dropped out of high school, educators need to rid themselves of old myths concerning the adult student and align themselves with some successful strategies to keep these students in the classroom.

The myths that surround the adult student are those connected with quotes we have heard most of our lives.

"Adults can't handle difficult material."

"You can't teach an old dog new tricks."

"All adults learn alike."

"Adults take the easy way out!"

"The memory and vision of older adults are problems."

In order to be effective, teachers must realize that one key to success is respecting themselves and their student's ability to learn. "What teachers

believe and how they behave directly influences learners' self-regard, motivation to learn, dependency on the teacher, and attitudes toward class activities and content" (Karmos and Greathouse, 1989, p. 28).

Joseph Karmos and Lillian Greathouse (1989, p. 28) indicate that adult students are aware of the myths surrounding their capabilities but feel they have great capacity to learn through a lifetime of experiences in solving problems. The beliefs of adult students in their ability to learn means they expect a teacher who is well organized in the classroom. This expectation comes, in part, from them having to manage a career, children, and family simultaneously. There are numerous reasons why adults return to school but the primary one is their desire to learn. They are competent and in control of their own lives and want to be recognized for the achievements they have made.

When considering what makes adult learners successful one must also consider what makes these students drop out of school. Effective teachers must be aware of the obstacles these students face so activities can be designed that will spark their interests to excel and remain in school.

"Reasons why nontraditional students return to the academic environments are often related to what caused them to leave in the first place"

(Roney, 1988, p. 6). Some of the obstacles noted include financial considerations, lack of encouragement, time, family commitments, job/class time conflicts, and motivation (Eschenmann & Olinger, 1989). Adults also return to school because of changes in their employment or family situations. Unfortunately, the frustrations of the college paperwork systems currently in place many times effects adult students more than their younger counterparts.

Financial considerations may play a large part in the adult's decision to return to school. Many institutions have financial programs in place to help the parents of traditional aged students, but for many adult students only a few financial opportunities exist unless the person is over 65 years of age and qualifies for free tuition.

Age can often be an emotional barrier for the adult student. The "social" atmosphere found in the classroom and on the campus often has the adult student coming to class directly from work. By arriving after many other students are already seated, they are often mistaken for the professor. This mistaken identity can make them feel out of place in the classroom environment.

As educators, we need to consider that the adult student can be a very

critical consumer of education. More importantly, they can bring with them unique experiences that younger students have not yet witnessed. Because of their attentiveness, the level of motivation of adult students can be initially high and generally will continue to be high if the teacher sparks that desire to continue learning.

When educators think of dropouts they often think of the 7 percent of United States students who dropout before 10th grade. Often, they do not consider that the adult student may desire to continue their education but are hindered by one, or more, of the unique obstacles they face. Betty Roberts (1980) in her book Middle Aged Career Dropouts says

> "...there appears to be three categories of dropouts. There were the planners, the impulsive, and the graduals. The planners often need the security of their money source as their first priority. The graduals often neither consciously acted nor reacted to their situations. As one can recall from childhood, leaping from a swing in motion can be both frightening and exhilarating" (p. 35).

The important aspect of these categories is that interest can run the gambit from excitement to one of wanting to escape. Everyone who has been in any educational setting may at one time or another have thought of dropping out because of the frustrations experienced in the classroom or the

pressure of other responsibilities. We come to realize that as we pass through these stages, or crises, we learn to cope with these pressures in different ways. This transition, or passage, through a crisis can often lead to failure. In many instances adult students consider dropping out of school because they feel they are different and cannot cope with the rigors that education demands. Roberts (1980) suggests that we are often equally intrigued with success and escape.

Elliott and Voss (1974) stated "...sixty six percent of the dropouts are classified as capable, 2 percent as involuntary dropout and 32 percent as educationally handicapped." (p. 97). These dropouts will often blame themselves or the system for their failure. In either respect becoming a dropout is inevitable.

Many of us have already heard of the "new" cradle to grave educational theory. Cervantes and Husted (1965) say "...over the long haul, programs in the nursery and kindergarten areas will probably be the most beneficial in preventing dropouts...in later life (p. 202). How an individual begins to think of education and the educational process at an early age determines their success through life. The feeling of not belonging to the educational setting can create weak self images that often continues through life. These weakened

self images play a significant part in determining educational success or failure. When considering this "new" cradle to grave theory, one must routinely talk about the value of motivational techniques in education at all stages of education. Just as it is often hard for a teenager to accept remote goals and delayed rewards, so too is it difficult for the adult student.

Background of the Study

In 1991, a 21 item questionnaire was developed to survey the attitudes of adult students with respect to continuing their education after a period of dropping out of school for one reason or another. The survey also investigated the support systems that were in place at the community college (i.e. advisor's help/independent learning/etc.) The age group included all students age 25 and older.

One hundred and thirty two adult community college students from a rural community college in Southwest Virginia participated in this study. The college staff provided the names of every student over the age of 25 who had missed an enrollment period for a semester/quarter or a full year. Data was collected from this student group to determine what factors made these students drop out of college. The student population that was surveyed represented those adult student that (a) had either dropped out of the

community college and were no longer enrolled or (b) had dropped out previously and were currently enrolled as either a full-time or part-time student. The first item on the instrument was used to verify the ages of the respondents. Ninety percent of the respondents were between the ages of 25 years and 49 years. The remaining ten percent of the respondents were between the ages of 45 years and 54 years. Only one of the respondents indicated they were past the age of 55 years. Table 1 shows the age groups of the respondents by age category.

Enrollment Profile

Of the 21 items included on the survey instrument, six items were included to obtain information concerning the respondent's enrollment profile. Specifically, these items were included to determine if the respondent was currently enrolled and the number of semester hours they had registered for.

Question number 1 stated, "Are you currently enrolled in any 2 year college course." Of the 130 individuals (98%) responding to this item, 13 (1%) responded yes and 117 (90%) indicated they were not currently enrolled. Two of the respondents (2%) did not reply to this item.

In some instances, adult students dropped out of the community college to attend four year institutions of higher learning. In these instances, enrollment

at 4 year institutions may be for the purpose of transferring previous credit earned for purposes of pursuing a baccalaureate degree; or to complete courses that can be transferred back to the community college, or to complete courses of a personal interest. The second item asked, "Are you currently enrolled in any 4 year college courses?" One hundred and twenty eight of the respondents (97%) answered this item. Sixteen students (13%) responded yes and 112 students (88%) responded no. Four individuals (3%) surveyed did not respond to this item.

The third item obtained information to identify the status of the respondents. Part-time students were considered to be any individual enrolled for eight or less semester hours. Full-time students were enrolled for 9 or more semester hours. Item number 3 asked, "If yes, how many hours have you registered for?" Of the 29 students who previously indicated that they were taking either 2 year or 4 year college courses, 25 (86%) responded to this item. Twelve of the participants (41%) responded as currently enrolled as a part-time student with less than 9 semester hours. Five of the part-time students were enrolled for only 3 semester hours. Thirteen of those participants indicated they were currently enrolled as full-time students. Four full-time students were enrolled for a total of 12 hours. One hundred and seven of the participants did

not respond to this item. Table 3 shows a breakdown of the enrollment pattern for both the part-time and full-time students by number of semester hours currently enrolled.

The fourth item on the survey was designed to obtain a previous enrollment history from those students who were not currently enrolled for courses at either a 2 year or 4 year college. The purpose of this item was to assess how long it had been since the participants had matriculated in a credit course. One of the participants responded that it had been one academic year since they had last enrolled for a college credit course. Seventy eight of the participants indicated that they had been out of school for 2 academic years. Seventeen participants had been out of school for three academic years. Three participants indicated they had been out of school for four years (2) and six years (1). Table 4 shows a breakdown of all participant responses to this item.

Item number five on the survey was designed to identify how many semester hours the participants had enrolled for during their last enrollment. One hundred and twelve participants responded to this item and 21 participants provided no information as requested. Of the 85% of the participants who responded to this item, the majority were enrolled as part-time students during their last semester by carrying less than 9 semester hours. Only 30 percent of the

respondents were enrolled as full-time students. Table 5 provides a breakdown of the participant's responses to this item.

One of the purposes of the survey was to identify the number of adult students that were enrolled as either a part-time or full-time students. Thirty eight of the students responding to this item indicated that they were part-time students. This represents 29 percent of the total students responding. The remaining 92 students, 71%, indicated they were part-time students. Two of the students, 2 percent of the total number of students, did not respond to this item.

Previous Academic Record

Many adult students do not enroll at the community college on a consistent basis. In some instances the student status of adults will vary from semester to semester. Depending on work requirements and family responsibilities, adults will enroll for different amounts of credit from semester to semester. Students who are enrolled as part-time on a consistent basis will obviously take longer to satisfy their degree requirements. This extended time can produce higher levels of frustration and lower levels of motivation. Two items were included on this survey to determine the student status of the respondents and the total number of credits they had successfully completed. The first item, number seven on the instrument, asked the participants if they "...have taken courses as a full-time,

part-time student, or both." One hundred and thirty one of the participants (99%) responded to this item. Forty of the participants (31%) responded that they were enrolled as part-time students. Thirty one students and 60 students responded they were full-time and had taken both part-time and full-time credit loads respectively. Only one student did not respond to this item.

Item number eight on the instrument asked the participants, "How many total credit hours have you successfully completed?" Each of the students were asked to provide both the total number of credits by quarter hours and semester hours. Sixty six students (50%) responded to this item. Twenty students (30%) had obtained between 50 and 100 semester hours. Twenty six percent of the students (17) indicated they had completed between 1 and 25 semester hours. Two students (3%) responded that they had accrued over 200 hours of community college credits. Table 6 provides a breakdown of the total number of credits that the respondents supported.

Barriers of Adult Students

The literature has demonstrated that adult students experience a variety of barriers that limits their ability to maintain a consistent enrollment in completing degree/course requirements. Eschenmann and Olinger (1989) identified several different barriers that adults experience when matriculating in programs of

study. Four items were included on the instrument to identify the types of barriers that adults have experienced and the impact these barriers have had on their academic progress.

Item number 9 on the instrument asked the respondents "Why did you choose not to continue your enrollment at the present time (check all that apply)? Each of the participants were given nine options on which to respond. These options included: lack of funds; lack of time; family commitments; change in career goals; health problems; lowered motivation; lacked consistent transportation; job conflicts; completed graduate requirements. Each of the 132 participants responded to this item. Table number seven provides a breakdown of all the participant responses to this item.

The second item that was included on the survey to identify barriers that adults faced and the impact these barriers had on their academic progress was item number 10. This item asked the participants, "Do you plan to continue taking courses in the future?" Ninety five percent of the participants (125) responded to this item and five percent (7 students) did not respond. Among those students responding, 116, or 93%, indicated they would continue to take additional courses in the future. Only nine students, or seven percent, indicated that they had no immediate plans to take additional courses in the future.

The next item, number 11 on the instrument, was intended to identify if those students who indicated they would enroll in the future would enroll as either a full-time or part-time student. One hundred and sixteen students had intentions of taking additional courses in the future. Of this number, 24 students (21%) indicated they would enroll on a full-time basis while 92 students (79%) indicated that their future enrollment would be as part-time students.

Item number 12 on the instrument was intended to identify if those adult students who were not currently enrolled had made a similar decision previously during their postsecondary education career. Specifically, item number 12 asked, "Is this the first time you made the decision not to continue your education?" Sixty seven participants (51%) responded to this item. Of these 67 students, 31 (46%) had previously withdrawn from school. The remaining 65 participants (49%) did not respond to this item. Table number 8 provides a summary of the responses to items 10, 11, and 12 on the survey.

Incentives

There are numerous reasons why individuals make the decision to enroll in community college programs. In some instances these reasons will influence their level of commitment to their program of study. One item was included on the survey to identify what initiative prompted the participants to enroll in

courses or programs of study. This item asked each participant to classify their college enrollment by five variables/incentives. These options included: l) degree/diploma/certificate student; 2) job advancement; 3) seeking new career, 4) pursuing personal interest(s); and 5) other, please specify. The participants were permitted to respond to as many options as were appropriate. One hundred and five participants (80%) indicated that their incentive was to obtain either a degree/diploma or certificate. Only 13 participants (10%) responded that they were pursuing personal interests. Forty one participants (31%) and 27 participants (20%) indicated their incentives were to seek a new career or for job advancement respectively. Seventeen participants (13%) used the "other, please specify" option to note that while they were initially completing courses for advancement on the job, they had either met the job requirement and quit (9 participants) or they had changed jobs and no longer needed to complete courses (8 participants). Table number nine summarizes the responses of the participants to survey item number 13.

Advisement

Eschenmann and Olinger (1989) suggests that advisement is not only a barrier for many adults in successfully completing their program of studies but is one barrier that can easily be rectified with structured programs for faculty

development. The quality of faculty advisement that adults receive can ease many problems that adults face, thus increasing the probability of program success. Their initial study indicated that adults viewed faculty advisement as an important component to their overall success but perceived the faculty to be inefficient in this activity. Five items were included on the survey to assess the perceptions of adults concerning the quality of advising they had experienced. The first item asked each participant to rate the quality of their advisement over 5 criteria. These criteria were: 1) poor; 2) fair; 3) average; 4) good; and 5) excellent. One hundred and twenty seven participants (96%) responded to this item. Among those participants responding, 50, or 39% rated the quality of their advisement as good. Thirty one participants (24%) rated their advisement as average and 22 (17%) rated their advisement as excellent. The remaining 24 respondents (19%) either rated their advisement as poor (2%) or fair (17%). Table number 10 provides a summary of the participants responses to this item.

In some instances, students who are not enrolled as "degree pursing students" are not assigned "official advisors" within their respective department. Instead, these students can seek advisement from a general advising pool. With this concept in mind, item number 15 asked each respondent "Did you have a faculty advisor?" All 132 participants responded to this item. One hundred and

twenty of the respondents (91%) indicated they had an advisor and the remaining 12 participants (9%) indicated they did not.

The participants were next asked to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their specific advisor. The response options that were provided to the participants included:

* flexible hours
* understood adult students
* realistic expectations
* motivated students
* explained curriculum
* assisted in solving in
* school related activities
* assist in personal advice

Ninety six of the participants (73%) responded to this item. Over 50 percent of the respondents saw the strengths of their advisors in five different areas. These areas were: explained the curriculum (93% favorable rating); understand adult students (89% favorable rating); flexible hours and realistic hours (84% favorable rating); and assisted in solving school related problems. The largest reported incidence of perceived weaknesses were motivated students

(45% unfavorable rating) and assisted in personal advice (39% unfavorable rating). Unfortunately, 36 participants (27%) indicated they never saw their advisor during their time at school. Table number 11 summarizes the responses to this survey item.

The fourth item included on the survey that related to the issue of advisement asked the participants how their advisor was assigned to them. One hundred and twenty five participants (95%) responded to this item. Among these respondents, 114 (91%) indicated that their advisor had been assigned to them. The remaining 11 (9%) participants indicated that they had personally selected their advisor.

The last item included on the survey in this section addressed the issue of the importance of the advisor. Item number 18 asked each participant, "Do you feel the advisor is an important part of a student's college success?" One hundred and twenty eight of the participants (97%) responded to this item. Four of the participants (13%) did not provide the requested information. Of those students responding, 117 (91%) stated yes and 11 (9%) stated no.

Extended Learning Opportunities

Many institutions have developed and implemented a variety of innovative delivery systems to accommodate the scheduling barriers that are experienced by

adults that either prevent, or limit, consistent class attendance. These extended learning opportunities consist of video courses and courses that are completed outside the traditional classroom setting. Three items were included on the survey to assess the availability and quality of these courses. The first item asked the respondents, "Have you taken any courses by independent/extended learning?" One hundred and twenty eight participants (97%) responded to this item and four (3%) did not provide the requested information. Of those adults responding to this item, only 29% indicated that they had taken advantage of this opportunity. The remaining 91 adult students (71%) indicated that they had never taken a course offered in an independent/extended learning format.

The second item addressing the independent/extended learning format was designed to obtain information concerning the frequency that adults enrolled for these courses. This item stated, "if yes, how many hours have you completed: __semester hours?" Of the 132 adult students participating in the study, only 37, or 28% responded to this item. Ninety five adults (72%) provided no information. The largest number of students who had enrolled for independent/extended learning courses (15/40%) had completed 15 semester hours under this delivery system. Seven adults (19%) had completed six semester hours. Table 12 summarizes the results of this item.

The final question addressing the issue of independent/extended learning concerned the perceived quality of these offerings. Each participant was asked "How would you rate the independent/extended learning option?" A five point scale was used to record their responses. This scale was: 1) poor; 2) fair; 3) average; 4) good; and 5) excellent. Only 54 adults (41%) responded to this item, while the remaining 78 adults (59%) either did not respond to this item or had failed to complete courses through an independent/extended learning format and thus were not qualified to make a judgement as to the quality of these activities. Of those adults who responded to this item, 47 (87%) rated these experiences as average or better. The majority of the adults among this group rated these courses as good (18/33%). Sixteen adults (30%) and 13 adults (24%) rated these opportunities as excellent or average respectively. Table 13 reports the responses of the adults to this item.

Conclusions

Enrollment Profile

Adult students often experience a series of barriers that prevents them from pursuing post secondary educational goals on a timely and consistent basis. For those adult students who are trying to maintain job and family responsibilities while also working full time, sporadic attendance as a part-time student can

become a major accomplishment. Many adults find it difficult to gain either the financial or psychological support to return to school once they have dropped out. Only 13 of our adult student dropouts indicated that they had returned to the classroom of two year institutions. These numbers were no more encouraging when considering those adults who may have left the community college to enroll in 4 year institutions. Only 16 students indicated that they were currently enrolled in 4 year institutions. Unfortunately, among the vast majority of our adult populations group, over 85% of those adults who had ceased their educational activities had failed to continue! The data also indicated that 83 adults (63%) had been out of school for two academic years or longer. Since the majority of these students were originally part-time (72/64%) and only able to complete 8 semester hours or less each semester, the opportunity to complete any degree or program requirements in a timely fashion remains highly unrealistic. These students can experience two devastating setbacks the longer they are outside the classroom. First, the increased demands both on the job and at home will heighten their frustrations and decrease their motivation to continue. Statements like "at the rate I'm going, it will take me six years to get a 2 year degree and by then I'll be too old" become a major problem that many students must face. A second problem these students can experience is that the longer it

takes to complete their degree requirements the greater the chance that previous coursework becomes dated, degree programs are either dropped or requirements change, or the degree is no longer needed. Regardless which of these situations may arise first, it can translate into wasted effort, time, money, and energy!

Previous Academic Record

The amount of time required to complete a course, or degree requirements, is an important factor in making a decision to pursue educational opportunities. This factor is particularly important to those students who are attempting to make decisions about pursuing educational programs and opportunities in middle age or later years. Among the adult dropout population that was surveyed, almost one-third (31%) indicated that they had only enrolled for courses on a part-time basis (8 semester hours or less). An additional 31 student (24%) were full time. The largest majority of these students (60/45%) had previously been enrolled as both part-time an full-time.

As increased enrollment opportunities arise, so also does the possibility of meeting graduation requirements sooner. This data seems to suggest that the number of adult students who dropped out is not related to the amount of college credit they had earned. Our dropouts included students with under 50 semester hours of credit as well as those with an excess of 50 semester hours.

Barriers of Adult Students

This group of adult students continued to identify common barriers as contributing to their dropping out. A previous study conducted by these researchers (Eschenmann and Olinger, 1989) identified nine major barriers that contributed to adults dropping out of school. These same nine barriers again surfaced with this adult student group and consists of:

lack of funds

lack of time

family commitments

change in career goals

health problems

lowered motivation

lacked consistent transportation

job conflicts

completed graduation requirements

It is unfortunate that many of these barriers will continue to play an important role in the decision to withdraw from school. Ironically, many of these barriers, which are related to limited financial resources available to adult students, will in all probability continue. At the same time, educational budgets are being

decreased at the Federal, state and local levels. In all probability the chances removing these financially related barriers in the near future seems bleak at best.

One positive pattern was identified in this study. While many of our adult dropouts had been out of school for two years or longer and recognized that financial support was a major barrier, 93% of our respondents indicated that they would take courses again in the future. The unfortunate trend of continuing as part-time students will also continue as 79% of the respondents indicated future enrollment as a part-time student.

One additional concern was also identified. Our data suggests that almost half of our participants (46%) reported a pattern of dropping out of programs and returning. While these students need to be commended for their motivation and persistence in returning, a continued cycle of dropping out, particularly as part-time student, only serves to move a program completion date further in the future. Care must be taken with these students so the attitudes "–I'll be too old" does not become a stumbling block in their success.

Initiatives

In spite of documented barriers that adults experience when making the decision to return to school, adults are enrolling in secondary (G.E.D. programs), post secondary, and collegiate programs of study in record numbers. These

enrollment patterns are an indication that incentives do exist that can overcome many of the barriers that adults experience. These incentives include, but are not limited to:

* the desire for a degree/diploma/certificate
* job advancement
* seeking skills for a new career
* pursuing personal interests

Among our participants, 80% reported a desire to obtain a degree/certificate/diploma. Seeking a new career or job advancement were the next two most popular incentives. Personal interest was only reported to be an incentive by 10% of our participants.

These results have important implications for administrators and counselors in programs serving adult students. Administrators must keep their curriculum offerings current with contemporary job vacancies and career fields. Their technical classroom and laboratories must be equipped with the latest technology. Non-traditional locations must be considered so they can serve a very useful purpose. Delivering courses in the actual workplace would not only ensure easy access for employed students but also reduce start up and modification costs which translates into profit.

Advisory committees, comprised of representatives from business and industry, use to be used as a mere "window dressing" venture. These committees are now a must if they are to be useful in designing and delivering programs for a technologically competent workforce.

Counselors will also play an important role in these ventures. Career counseling activities utilizing the most current labor data information is essential. Open houses, business/industry exchange, pamphlets, recruitment visits, and public forums are excellent vehicles to use for these efforts. Additionally, if counselors are to meet the educational needs of adult students they must be trained to accommodate the adult student. Adult students are not grown children and counselors can no longer approach them as if they were. Meeting the needs of adult students will also require flexible and non-traditional hours. If counselors do not look forward to the thought of having to work nights and weekends when adults are frequently available, they can leave the safe confines of their college office and set up counseling centers in the community. Better yet, obtain a room in the actual workplace!

Advisement

The quality of the advisement that a student receives can play an important role in the student's educational success. For a variety of reasons, while many

adults see advisement as an important part of their academic success, many do not perceive the quality of the advisement to be high (Eschenmann & Olinger, 1989).

The adults surveyed in this study reported that advisement was critical to their educational success and over 80% responded favorably toward the quality of the advisement they achieved. Our adult students specifically identified the following factors as strengths of their advisors:

* flexible hours
* understood adult students
* realistic expectations
* explained the curriculum

These factors speaks favorably to the efforts of those advisors who are already involved and they should be encouraged to keep up the good work in these areas. The fact that the majority of the advisors (91%) were assigned, and not student selected, shows a commitment of the majority of the teachers to prove effective student advisement.

There were two areas identified in this study that the adult students perceived to be weaknesses in their advisement. The first was in the area of motivation. This same concern was identified by Eschenmann & Olinger (1989).

Advisors need to understand that they can be effective motivator but must be trained to do so. Advisor training sessions in the area of motivation are excellent staff development activities.

A second reported weakness in advisement was in the area of assisting in personal advice. While more difficult, some personal problems of students can be discussed during an advisement session and handled quite effectively. Others, however, may require that the student seeks professional help. In these instances a student advisor can still play a very beneficial role by helping the student locate the appropriate source.

Extended Learning Opportunities

The emergence of extended learning opportunities have been a development that is intended, in part, to meet the needs of non-traditional students. Extended learning opportunities have been designed to permit students the opportunity to enroll for, and complete, courses outside of the traditional classroom environment. Adult students who are faced with job and family responsibilities and commitments during the traditional daytime class hours are provided educational opportunities that otherwise would not be available.

In spite of the flexibility for increased educational opportunities, less than one third (29%) of the adults surveyed in this study had taken courses using the

extended learning format. This low number may reflect the flexible scheduling patterns of classes taught in a traditional classroom setting.

Among those students who had enrolled for extended learning courses, almost half (47%) rated the quality of these courses as being good to excellent. Only seven students gave extended learning classes a poor (1/2%) or fair (6/11%) rating. Even though a small number of students had completed courses through this format, the potential these courses hold for the adult student warrants that they be continued. These course offerings permits both community college and students, educational opportunities that would not otherwise be available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The data collected for each of the 132 participants provided information that can be used to address the problems of adults as dropouts. This information will be beneficial to teachers, advisors, and administrators of programs that serve the adult students. Based on the data that was analyzed and the conclusions that were drawn by the researchers, the following recommendations are made. The implementation of these recommendations should assist programs serving the adult students to reduce the possibility of adults becoming another component in the dropout statistics.

* **A follow-up program and procedure should be developed and implemented to track those adult students who have dropped out of school. This program should include an exit survey of all students who do not pre-enroll for the forthcoming semester. The stated reasons for not returning should be used to gauge the quality and effectiveness of the adult program delivery system.**
* **Since many adults are enrolled on a part-time basis, special considerations should be made for these students that will promote a sustained interest in pursuing a degree. These considerations could include:**
    * **counseling sessions**
    * **buzz groups**
    * **referral systems**
    * **24 hour hotline**
* **Many adult students have an established**

pattern of dropping out of school, only to return at a later date. Outreach programs should be developed and made available to these students that will "soften" the feeling of defeat/frustration.

* The role of advisement is critical to the success of the adult student. Those teachers currently assigned adult student advisees should be trained on effective advisement practices and appropriately rewarded for their efforts.

* Many adults still do not perceive their teachers as being effective motivators. Staff development activities should be used to provide the teachers of adult students with motivational strategies that have proved effective with this student group.

* A method should be developed that would help adult students receive advice and assistance for

personal problems. Qualified staff should be made available to these students and/or a referral agency of specialized assistance should be created.

* **Extended learning opportunities should be continued to ensure that all adult students who desire an education can obtain one. The quality of these extended learning opportunities should be monitored closely and carefully supervised.**

TABLES

Table 1

Number and Percent of Responses by Age Group

Age Group In Years	Number of Responses	Percent of Total Responses
25-29	37	28
30-34	31	24
35-39	28	21
40-44	24	18
45-49	5	4
50-54	6	5
55-over	1	.1

Table 2

Enrollment Profile of Respondents By Questions 1 and 2

Item Number		Yes		No		No Responses	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1.	Are you currently enrolled in any 2 year college courses?	13	10	117	89	2	2
2.	Are you currently enrolled in any 4 year college courses?	16	12	112	85	4	3

Table 3
Enrollment Patterns By Credit Load For Part-Time and Full-Time Students

Student Status	Responses by Student Status: Number Responding	Percent Responding
PART-TIME		
Less than 3 sem. hrs.		
3 sem. hrs.	5	4
4 sem. hrs.	3	2
5 sem. hrs.		
6 sem. hrs.	2	2
8 sem. hrs.	2	2

Table 3 (Continued)
Enrollment Patterns By Credit Load For Part-Time and Full-Time Students

Responses by Student Status

Student Status	Number Responding	Percent Responding
FULL-TIME		
9 sem. hrs.	1	.1
10 sem. hrs.	1	.1
11 sem. hrs.		
12 sem. hrs.	4	3
13 sem. hrs.	1	.1
14 sem. hrs.	2	2
15 sem. hrs.	2	2
16 sem. hrs.		
17 sem. hrs.		
18 sem. hrs.	1	.1
19 sem. hrs.		
20 sem. hrs.	1	.1

Table 4

During What Year and Semester

Were You Last Enrolled?

Year and Semester	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Fall Sem. 91		
Sum. Sem. 91	1	
Sp. Sem. 91		
Fall Sem. 90	75[1]	
Sum. Sem. 90		
Sp. Sem. 90		
Fall Sem. 89	2[2]	
Sum. Sem. 89		
Sp. Sem. 89	3[2]	
Fall Sem. 88	1	
Sum. Sem. 88	1	

1

2 3 additional participants responded 1990 but did not indicate the semester.

15 additional participants responded 1989 but did not indicate the semester.

Table 5

Number of Hours Enrolled For During The Previous Semester by Student Status

Responses By Student Status

Student Status Part-Time or Full-Time	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Part-Time (N=72)		
1	1	.9
2	1	.9
3	34	30
4	11	9
5	3	3
6	13	12
7	4	4
8	5	4

Table 5 (Continued)

Number of Hours Enrolled For During

The Previous Semester by Student Status

Responses By Student Status

Student Status Part-Time or Full-Time	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Full-Time (N=40)		
9	8	7
10	1	.9
11	3	3
12	10	9
13	6	5
14	4	4
15	0	0
16	2	2
17	4	4
18	2	2

Table 6

Total Number of Hours Earned By

Respondents Regardless of Student Status

(N=66; 50 percent)

Number of Credits Completed	Number of Participants Responding	Percent of Participants Responding
1-25 hours	17	26
26-50	14	21
50-100	20	31
100-150	8	12
150-200	5	8
over 200 hours	2	3

Table 7

Why Did You Choose Not To Continue Your Enrollment At The Present Time?

(Check All That Apply) (N=132)

Option	Number of Participants Responding	Percent of Participants Responding
*Lack of Funds	126	95
*Lack of Time	124	94
*Family Commitments	119	90
*Change in Career Goals	126	95
*Health Problems	129	98
*Lowered Motivation	129	98
*Lacked Consistent Transportation	130	98
*Job Conflicts	123	93
*Completed Graduation Requirements	132	100

Table 8

Summary of Responses to Survey

Items 10, 11, and 12

Item Number And Statement		Number Responding	Percent Responding
10.	Do you plan on taking courses in the future?		
	YES	116	88
	NO	9	7
	No Response	7	5
11.	If yes, how will you enroll?		
	Part-Time	92	79
	Full-Time	24	21
	No Response	N/A	
12.	Is this the first time you withdrew?		
	YES	31	46
	NO	36	54
	No Response	65	49

Table 9

Summary of Participant Responses

To Item Number 13 By Option Category

(N=132)

Option	Number of Responses	Percent of Total Responses
Pursue certificate/ degree/diploma	105	80
Job advancement	27	20
Seeking new career	41	31
Pursuing personal interest(s)	13	10

Table 10

How Would You Rate The Quality of Your Advisement? (N=127)

Rating	Number of Participants Responding	Percent of Participants Responding
Poor	2	2
Fair	22	17
Average	31	24
Good	50	39
Excellent	22	17
No Response (Based on N=132)	5	4

Table 11

Summary of Student Responses To

Advisor Strengths and Weaknesses

By Category of Response (N=96).*

Category	Perceived Strength		Perceived Weaknesses	
	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Flexible Hrs.	81	84	30	31
Understood the Adult Student	85	89	18	19
Realistic Expectations	81	84	20	21
Motivated Students	61	64	43	45
Explained the Curriculum	89	93	27	28

Table 11 (continued)

Summary of Student Responses To

Advisor Strengths and Weaknesses

By Category of Response (N=96).*

Category	Perceived Strength		Perceived Weaknesses	
	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Assisted in Solving School Related Problems	71	74	28	29
Assisted in Personal Advice	43	45	37	39

*Thirty six participants indicated they never saw their advisor and did not respond to this item.

Table 12

Number of Semester Hours Completed Through Independent/Extended Learning Courses? (N=37)*

Number of Semester Hours Completed	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
0	3	8
1	2	5
3	15	41
4	1	3
5	2	5
6	7	19
9	1	3
10	1	3
28	2	5
30	1	3
32	1	3
100	1	3

* Ninety five adults (72%) did not respond to this item.

Table 13

How Would You Rate The Independent/Extended Learning Option? (N=54)*

Rating	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Poor	1	2
Fair	6	11
Average	13	24
Good	18	33
Excellent	16	30

*Seventy eight of the participants (59%) did not respond to this item.

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